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HEADLINE: Oswald finally gets his day in court Did he really kill JFK? Lawyers plan mock trial

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San Francisco - The United States of America v. Lee Harvey Oswald.

It's being billed as "the trial of the century." All the major television networks and newspapers are here. A cable network is airing it live, gavel to gavel.

And while it is only a mock trial, the participants are taking it very seriously.

The American Bar Association, which is meeting in San Francisco this week, has hired some of the nation's best lawyers to prosecute and defend Lee Harvey Oswald on the charge that he and he alone shot and killed President John F. Kennedy almost 29 years ago.

"We want this to be both entertaining as well as educational," said Peter Freeman, an ABA official who is directing the mock trial. "Besides learning about new trial techniques and advance computer analysis, do not be surprised if some fascinating new insights into the assassination are revealed."

Several previous mock trials of Oswald have been staged by various organizations, but this one, being conducted under the auspices of the ABA, is expected to be the most definitive.

The two-day trial will feature testimony from eyewitnesses who were in Dallas's Dealey Plaza during the shooting, as well as from medical and forensic experts. Opening argument will be heard this morning, testimony this afternoon and Tuesday morning, and closing argument Tuesday afternoon.

Two juries will hear the evidence: a panel of judges and lawyers, and a dozen San Francisco residents selected randomly from local jury pools. The juries will issue their verdicts Tuesday evening.

"This will combine the crime of the 20th century with the courtroom computer techniques of the 21st century," Mr. Freeman said. "But unlike previous mock trials we have conducted, this one is being taken a lot more seriously. It's much more emotionally charged."

In the past two years, the ABA has "tried" Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for war crimes (he was convicted) and gangster Al Capone for tax evasion (he was acquitted).

Court TV, which is received by 7 million homes nationally, will broadcast the trial live.

New York attorney David Boies will defend Oswald, with assistance from noted defense attorney F. Lee Bailey.

"I will probably get booed out of the room when I present my case," said San Francisco trial lawyer James Brosnahan, who once worked for Attorney General Robert Kennedy as a federal prosecutor. "But I believe Oswald did shoot the president and probably did it alone."

Mr. Brosnahan concedes that his is a minority view. A recent Time magazine poll showed that 76 percent of Americans believe that Oswald did not act alone.

GRAPHIC: Photo: mug of Lee Harvey Oswald